

# What Parents Can Do to Encourage Achievement

## 1. Encourage your children to take challenging courses in middle school and high school.

Talk with your children about their future education and career goals. Help them map out which courses they will need to get there. If you aren't sure yourself, ask a school counselor or teacher. Make sure your children understand why it's important to take courses like algebra in middle school. If your school district doesn't offer advanced high school courses, work with others to change this situation.

## 2. Make clear that school is the number one priority for young people.

It's normal for your child to want to participate in sports, after-school, and social activities, but make sure academics receive high priority. Keep tabs on activities that take time away from learning. American teenagers spend more time dating, caring for younger siblings, and doing household chores than teenagers in many other countries.

Limit the hours students work, if they have to work at all, and make sure their studies don't suffer. Students who work more than 20 hours a week generally earn lower grades, spend less time on homework, cut class more, and cheat more often.

## 3. Look at your own beliefs about achievement and the messages you send.

Make sure your own words and actions send a positive message about school achievement. Make clear that effort counts more than inborn ability. When we say such things as, "I just don't have a head for math," or "He's a born artist," we may signal to our children that it's not worth trying things that don't come easily.

Hold high expectations, and back up teachers who maintain high standards. Parents who put down teachers, pressure them to give their children higher grades than they deserve, or blame tests for being too hard are sending mixed messages about achievement.

## 4. Encourage and supervise your children's studies at home.

Make space and time at home for serious study, and monitor your children's homework. Children who discussed their studies at home at least once a week had higher average scores on a national reading test than those who discussed studies less often. Children will learn more if you offer homework guidance, instead of answers.



**5. Become involved with your teenager's school activities.**

High school students do better when their parents take an active interest in their studies and attend school activities. Yet more than 40% of parents of high school students never attend school activities.

**6. Help to create a society that values academic achievement.**

Teenagers sometimes ridicule kids who make an effort in school. Children also pick up negative messages about achievement from television, movies, music, and even casual adult conversation. The values you instill will help your children stand up to outside pressure. You can also enlist support from other people that your children admire.

All of us can encourage student achievement. Employers can pay more attention to courses taken when hiring young workers. Educators can help people understand why certain courses are important and why high standards are necessary. Community groups can set up programs to recognize high-achieving young people. The whole nation benefits when students learn more and become more productive citizens.

*This information was excerpted from "Tell Your Children—It Pays to Study Hard!"—a brochure from the Center on Education Policy in Washington, DC. For more information or to view the entire brochure, visit the Center's Web site at [www.ctredpol.org](http://www.ctredpol.org). Go to the Publications page and look under Publications by Topic, Student Achievement.*



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